Interview with former pharmacist's mate William E. Royals present at Kwajalein and Iwo Jima. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 14 and 21 Jan 1999. (1928-2022)

Where are you from?

I'm a North Carolina native born in a little town called Erwin. I did the papers to go into the Navy in Danville, VA, which is just over the line, but was sworn in in Richmond. That was on August 15th 1942.

What prompted you to go into the service?

The war kind of had all the young guys' blood going a little bit and I was an active teenager. And it was the thing to do--to get into it if you could. I probably chose the Navy because ... There used to be a lot of movies on the Navy in the '30s. Even radio programs... I remember a character--Don Winslow of the Navy. I used to listen to that on the radio all the time. I think that's probably what did it. I don't remember even thinking about anything else. It was the Navy right from the very beginning.

How old were you?

I was 14.

What happened after you signed up and took the oath?

I actually went to Richmond to take the oath. From there I went to the Naval Training Center at Great Lakes.

Let's go back a bit. You had mentioned that you were 14 years old. How did that happen? How did you manage to join the Navy at that age?

The age for enlistment was 17. I just started bugging my mother and was able to get her to sign the papers. And, of course, I was a handful. I finally badgered her enough until she signed the papers. She and one of my aunts, as a matter of fact. I had a little Bible that my grandmother had given me way, way back. And I played with one of the figures and made it look like a 25 instead of a 28. And that's how I did it. I think my mother thought that I'd be back in 2 or 3 weeks.

So, you took the Bible with you as proof?

Yes. I remember asking the recruiter if I looked 17. And he said, "Hell, don't you know how old you are?" I said, "Sure I do." So off I went on my little mission. And that's how I did it. It wasn't very complicated. I wasn't the only young looking guy but I was pretty tough and independent. Boot camp was no real problem. Every day everything was new to me. I had never been anywhere. I never met so many different kinds of people with so many different accents and from different places. I met people who were not southern Baptists and who didn't care for grits. For me it was a big adventure.

Had you planned on being a corpsman?

No. That came about long after I got out of boot camp. Like thousands of other people, we were on those trains on our way to the West Coast. And once there, I rode the old transport

Henderson (AP-1) out to Pearl Harbor and got assigned to the heavy cruiser *Salt Lake City* (CA-25).

Did you have any leave after graduating from boot camp?

I had a short leave of maybe 7 days, as I recall, and then I reported back and got onto the train. The train rode us all the way into where the *Henderson* was docked. We got off the train and walked to the ship. I don't remember whether that was San Pedro or Los Angeles.

So you were just a seaman at that point?

Yes, just an apprentice seaman.

Do you remember what the voyage was like?

I remember that I was sick all the time. On the *Henderson* some of us had to string and sleep in those old Navy hammocks. I couldn't even put mine up. I had to get help from other folks to get the thing strung up on those hammock hooks. It was so high up off the deck; the route to get into the thing was to climb up on some lockers. I wasn't a very big guy at that time. I was still growing. The master at arms came through every morning and swatted you in the butt with a baton to get you out. Other then the time I was in that hammock, I think I was sick all the time till the day we arrived 7 days later.

Did you get off the ship in Hawaii?

Got off in Pearl and went to the receiving station and was around there for a week or two, as I recall. There was a big field out by the receiving station and everybody came out there every day. They called out over the loud speaker different assignments. That's where I got assigned to the *Salt Lake City*. While we were hanging around there, we had all these work details to do. I worked in the mess hall some and one day I went out to the *West Virginia* (BB-48) and helped off-load ammunition and stuff the divers were bringing up. Eventually, I got my assignment to the *Salt Lake City* and I went on there in November of '42.

What was your impression of the ship?

Oh, I was in hog heaven. That was the Navy. You've got to remember that I was very young and all this was big time adventure. When I saw those first ships in Pearl Harbor, I thought that had to be the greatest thing in the world--all those ships and flags flying. This is the real Navy. That was my first impression. And if you go on a warship like a heavy cruiser--all those big guns and all those sailors. You're not hauling taters and fuel. This is the real thing.

What was your first assignment as a crew member?

The very first thing I had to do was go to some kind of orientation division. I was in that and doing mess duty for a week or so. And you had all that paint-chipping stuff and all those early hours for meals. In between meals you would chip paint down on the mess deck. One of my things was slicing bread. We had a big bakery aboard and we did our own bread. I had to run a hand-cranked slicing machine.

A hand crank machine?

Yes. I would slice until my arm felt like it would fall off. Eventually I had to do my turn in the scullery. It was hotter than the hinges of hell. I passed out one time in there and wound up

in the sick bay. And that's how they got me. I stayed in the sick bay a little while and then pretty soon the first thing I knew I was a striker.

How did that work? How did you become a striker?

It was pretty informal, as I remember. By then I was a seaman second. I don't recall any conversations about anybody asking me whether I wanted to be a striker. I was just there. They put me to work and pretty soon they had me reading things in that old 1939 edition of the *Hospital Corps Handbook*. And they started putting me though some drills for naming bones and systems and things like that. That's the way it happened. It just kind of grew. But, I was also underage and not a real big guy. I think it might have grown out of somebody sensing that... Maybe I just looked like I needed taking care of. They just took me in. I remember one time we were doing drills on the *Salt Lake* before I went down into the sick bay. They had assigned me to the shell deck and we were doing some firing. You had to take those big shells out of an elevator and spin them, sort of roll them around your hand to get them over to the gun breech or another elevator. I couldn't do it. They were too big and too heavy for me to handle. I think the culmination of all that is what made me wind up in sick bay. I actually ended up talking to the exec on the ship. I had a special interview and he asked me if I wanted to go home and I told him no! And that's the last I heard of it.

Once you were a striker in sick bay, did they begin giving you responsibilities as far as giving first aid or treating patients?

No. I emptied a whole lot of trash cans, chipped a lot of paint, and swabbed a lot of decks.

Where was the *Salt Lake* operating around that time?

I picked it up in Pearl in November, 1942. Sometime after the first of year, 1943, the *Salt Lake* was reassigned to a task force group off the Aleutians. It had something to do with the Japanese being on Attu. We were cruising around up there and eventually... You may know something about this. There was an engagement that took place called the Battle of the Komandorskis. My job then was in the forward battle dressing station. Most of that was just waiting around for something to happen. I never did much of anything in the forward battle dressing station. We had a doctor, a commander, who was there who manned that particular area. It happened to be in the officers' ward room, as a matter of fact. We had an officer who was killed and brought into the forward battle dressing station. The only thing I distinctly remember ever doing was helping to haul him off to one of the state rooms until something else could be done. Otherwise we just rode it out. During that engagement, which ran about 3 ½ hours of continuous shooting, the ships were sometimes in sight of each other.

Did you actually see any of this?

The officers' ward room was right off the quarterdeck on the main deck level. I remember getting out of there one time outside the hatch to look but I didn't see anything. And then I was back in a flash. But you could tell when the ship got hit with a shell. The *Salt Lake* got stuck dead in the water for awhile. It was not moving at all. And it was filling up with water. Otherwise we just ran patrols up and down the Aleutians and into the Bering Sea. I was standing watch almost every night. I would usually be on the mid-watch, wearing earphones in one of those watch stations on the ship.

How long were you aboard?

I went aboard in November '42 and came off in July of '43. Because of the damage we had sustained in that Komandorski thing, we went back to Mare Island. The doctor, CDR Lofin, went back to the east coast while we were in the shipyard. When we got our repairs done and he was back, we went back up to the Aleutians but it was just a short period of time before I got my orders sending me to the nearest naval or mobile hospital for training. My orders were as a HA deuce. I think that's the way they came in. I was never scared or anything during that Komandorski battle. I don't think I was even nervous. I did very well. I always thought CDR Lofin was pretty pleased with me and was also looking out for me. I always suspected that when he got back to the east coast and into BUMED that's what originated my set of orders to get me off the *Salt Lake* and to the hospital at Long Beach.

Was there any paperwork that you had to sign or did you suddenly find yourself in a new rate?

I think I was just designated and I think it may have been when that set of orders came in.

So they decided for you that you were going to be a corpsman.

Yes. The guys on the ship were spending much time with me teaching me things out of the handbook.

You were kind of like everybody's baby brother.

I got a feeling that was right. I think those that didn't know sensed that I just wasn't a grown up person. If that was true, I think it benefited me in some ways.

So you ended up at Long Beach.

Yes. Long Beach Naval Hospital.

What did they have you doing there?

Teaching me how to make beds, how do deal with nurses. And I didn't like it one damn bit. Look at the contrast. I had just come from a warship with 1,200 people on it, going around the world shooting at things and here I am at this hospital. I don't remember how long I was there but it was not very long, just a few months. I then volunteered for Marine duty.

Did they offer you the job or did you see something up on a bulletin board?

Something on the BB, I think.

Did you know what FMF meant? A lot of guys I've spoken to said, "FMF? Gee, that must mean going to sea again."

No. I'm not sure I analyzed it that closely. If you had asked me what FMF was, I probably wouldn't have known, but I knew what Marine duty was and I knew it sounded kind of exciting. And it was back to the war where all the exciting things happened. I'm pretty sure that was my notion. I'm also sure that if I had really analyzed it real well, I might have kept my mouth shut and stayed where I was. But I volunteered. They were sending bunches of guys so I ended up at Camp Elliott just outside San Diego.

Do you remember when that was?

I got to the Field Medical Service School on October 5th in '43.

What was your impression when you suddenly realized you were now essentially a Marine, not quite but almost?

I think I was kind of excited by it. You had all these new uniforms. You looked different. I think I just ate it up. They worked the hell out of you but I think I liked it. I don't remember being real crazy about all the trooping and stomping and hiking but all the other things like going on liberty and sporting that Marine outfit with the leather belt and that sort of thing. I guess I took some kind of delight in all of that.

What was the training like?

It probably was the only training that made me of any value at all in what happened later because it was basic and dumbed down. You didn't get a whole lot of things about how many bones and that sort of thing. You got lot of pretty basic instruction about emergency care--pretty crude emergency care. I remember they had written tests and I did not do well. For instance, they restricted me. I got in the brig while I was there. If you didn't pass those tests you had to study at night. I remember there was a Thanksgiving weekend coming up that I just had to have. There were some females in Long Beach that my buddy and I had met and we just had to go. But we were both on restriction and we sat in the class until taps. And when taps came we got into our uniforms and went out across the boonies and onto the highway heading for Long Beach.

What was the subject you were having trouble with at the time?

I don't remember specifically. But the staff at that school was pretty thorough. I remember there was a Marine first lieutenant in charge of our company. And there was a platoon sergeant. The hospital corpsmen in charge were some of those guys that had been to jump school. And they got to dress a little bit differently in those jump boots that nobody else had. They were pretty serious about not taking any lip. Things were a lot tighter back then than they are now.

Did you learn a lot of first aid?

Yes. A lot of combat first aid. Plasma, morphine syrettes, plugging chest wounds. All the basics. I hadn't really gotten that on the *Salt Lake*. What they taught was what a young guy needs to know even today if he's going to go with a Marine company. You really need to know some of those basic things.

You got weapons familiarization too.

Yes. They had us stripping the .45 although I never remember carrying one. It seems I always had a carbine. They used to have an automatic weapon called a Reising gun. I remember firing that on the range. When I was in the brig, they had us marching us around in a platoon with those old '03 rifles. But the bolts had been removed and they had filled the space with lead.

To make them heavier?

Yes. And that's the way I learned the manual of arms.

How long were you in the brig?

I was in there twice. I lipped off to one of the staff corpsmen and was given 3 days. But I ended up staying 5 days. And when I came back, that's when I got into trouble over the testing. I got a deck court martial out of my unauthorized Thanksgiving weekend and 5 more days in the brig. Out of the 7 weeks I was in training, I lost about 13 days in the brig.

Did you have to make up that training time?

No. I wasn't given any extra days at the school. However, there were just a few of us left. The class had already moved out. They were already assigned.

So you just got less training.

That's right. It doesn't sound too neat now, does it?

No. You probably needed all the training you could get. Where did they send you from there?

I was assigned to the Fourth Marine Division. All this moved pretty fast. I think we checked in at Pendleton and right away were assigned to the Tenth Amphibious Tractor Battalion just across the street from the main gate of Camp Pendleton, across the highway and on the water. In just a matter of days, it was back to the Division and I was assigned to something called the Fourth Special Weapons Battalion. And that's how I left the states in January of '44. I think I was with the headquarters battery as a battery corpsman or something like that. I went on the *Elmore* (APA-42), a troop transport, down to the Marshalls.

How long did that trip take?

Oh, that was a long one; I don't remember the number of days but it was forever.

Were you sick every day like you were on the *Henderson*?

No, I did okay. I wasn't bothered at all.

You were a grizzled old salt by that time.

Yea, I was really getting tough. And I had much more experience than most of the people around me in terms of knowing what the war was about. I had already been to sea. I had already been involved in a battle. I had already seen battle casualties. Most of those guys hadn't experienced that at all. You're right. In one sense, I was the old salt.

What happened once you got to the Marshalls?

We were at Kwajalein atoll. There were two islands, Roi and Namur. My unit didn't go in until late in the day. There was a little pier that stuck out into the lagoon on the side of Namur and I spent the first night there on that little pier.

How did you get ready for the landing?

I don't remember a lot about preparation for that particular landing.

Do you remember how you got to the beach?

Yes. LCVP, I think.

Did you have to climb down on the rope net?
Over the side of the ship, sure.

Do you remember the gear you were carrying?
I had a pack, of course. The corpsmen had something called a Unit 3 slung over your shoulder and we had what we called a Hospital Corps knife. As far as medical gear goes, I think that was about it. However, the next day when we moved in just a few yards to one of those old blasted out buildings, we set up a little sick bay of sorts but I really can't remember who had the gear or who carried it, or if there was anything beyond those Unit 3's.

When you went in that late afternoon most of the resistance was pretty well over with?
There was a lot of shooting and banging going on during the night but there was nothing we ran into the next morning as we proceeded up off the end of the pier and down to the corner. We just saw bodies and that sort of thing. There was a bit of shooting going on to our right on Namur and occasionally over the next few days. It was pretty quiet but you would get a lot of excitement because somebody would get shot at by somebody down a hole or up in a tree. But initially we just walked to that building and set up our gear for a sick bay.
At the end of the building there was a huge room with huge steel doors at one end. And those doors were sort of blown off kilter a bit so that you could slip into that room. We medical folks had to clear out that room.

What was in there?
There were dead melted bodies that had been burned. It was a very tough detail to deal with.

These were Japanese?
Yes, Japanese. As I recall, we hauled out of there something like 70 people in pieces and parts. We wrapped them up in blankets, shelter halves, anything that would hold stuff. I don't know where they were hauled to.

Had the building been hit by a bomb?
It looked like it might have been. Something caused a helluva fire in there. Whether they had been incinerated from that or some other way, I don't know. But it looked like a blast had gotten those huge doors off kilter. You remember a thing like that.
There's something else I remember. Roi and Namur are hooked together by a sandspit and they assigned me to a detail to go out there to help bury some of our guys. We went out just about the time it was getting dark and arrived just as it was really getting dark. We were standing around on the lips of those shell craters when we got shot at. So we went down in the holes until things quieted down. All the rest of that night we were digging holes and putting Marines in them. In that early excitement I had no idea where my carbine was and didn't find it until the next morning. They secured us a little before daylight.

You must have felt pretty vulnerable without your carbine.

Listen. I wrapped my hand around the cartridge belt of one of those Marines and that's where I stayed. I stayed hooked on to him until it got daylight and then I found the carbine and I was okay. That was the most memorable thing for me at the Kwajalein landing. We moved once from where we came in on the lagoon side of the island. We moved across the island and further out to the right. I remember there were deep ditches like tank traps coming in from the seaward side. And three of us corpsmen set up inside that ditch and put up a little tarp. No sooner had we got settled then we had to move because we were on top of a decaying body. We hung around that area for a couple of days. We nosed around and got into a Japanese machine gun emplacement just a few steps from that ditch. I picked up a couple of pictures. There was some cut up Japanese money. We got hold of that. There was some underclothing and some pictures. I got the pictures and kept them for a long long time. Eventually, I sent them back to the Japanese embassy. We also picked up an anti-personnel mine. As much as they had taught us about that, we were so damn stupid that we didn't know what it was. We picked it up and had it in hand when a Marine sentry came around the end of this little sand dune and said, "You guys better get out of there because there are mines all over the place. Then we realized what was going on. The sun was shining on us dumdums that day.

And then we just got the word to move out. It couldn't have been more than 4 or 5 days. We moved out and loaded on a ship in the lagoon and that night the Japanese made a bombing run on Roi and we all got put on standby to go back to deal with that but apparently that just blew over. We stayed on that ship (the SS *Robin Wentley*) and went back to Maui.

Had you treated any casualties while you were on Roi?

No, nothing more than somebody coming around to sick bay and asking for a bandaid.

So you went back to Maui and got ready for the next operation.

Yes. There was a huge camp on the side of that mountain. The next thing for the Fourth Marine Division was Saipan-Tinian. They put me in the rear echelon for that one so I didn't go. I had to work for a dentist. I remember I was awfully put out about that. I had no desire to do that but there I was pumping his little field drill for him. I just stayed on Maui until everyone came back. The special weapons battalion had broken up for some reason and I had been assigned to the Fourth Medical Battalion some time during that time period.

What was the next operation?

Iwo.

What do you remember about getting ready for that?

I remember some of the details from some of the briefings. The medical battalion provided support to the regiments. For that operation we were assigned to the Third Battalion 25th Marines. I was on something called a collecting team. It was supposed to operate from the lines back to the battalion aid station. There were six or seven of us. All I can remember about that is you were just told where to go. Get your gear and go here or there. I don't remember the details about that except you just changed locations, got ready, and got on the ship. But once on the ship, they would include us in those briefings about the landings on Iwo Jima and I can still remember one detail. The Japanese were supposed to have a big mortar. I remember them talking about the island being like a pork chop with the mountain at one end. And that the Third Battalion 25th Marines was going to be down on Blue Beach 2, which was the pivot point. They

were supposed to land and go up over those airfields. But they were supposed to pivot around on that Blue Beach area and I remember them saying that that was going to be a particularly dangerous area. I guess they were thinking about dealing with what was coming out of those rocks and hills on that end of the island.

Did they show you any models? Some of the folks I've talked to said they took out a model of the island.

It seems to me they showed us something like that.

What kind of ship were you on?

A troop transport. It was an APA but I can't remember the name of it. I remember we loaded up and were on it for a number of days. We actually stopped in Honolulu harbor and tied up at a pier on the way out. They had some of us doing close order drill. There was, of all things, an Italian POW enclosure there.

Italian?

It was strange. It was right down at the piers. You could see the Aloha Tower from where we were. Of course, every American outfit has at least one guy who speaks Italian and they were trying to hold some conversations with the guys inside. And then one of the officers showed up and ran them off. They had to go. There were a few Asians in there also; I'm not sure whether they were Japanese. Isn't that strange? Right there in Honolulu.

The other day we left off when you were heading to Iwo Jima.

I remember the briefings and the Marines talking about some kind of mortar that they thought they had identified that they had not seen before. It was supposed to be humongously big. They were also discussing the island and the shape of it. Of course, they also discussed the beach layout to the outfit with which I was going to land. I don't recall the type of boat we went in on. It was probably a LCVP. The Third Battalion, 25th Marines had been assigned to Blue Beach 2. I remember them talking about that being the pivot point for the sweep that was going to go up and over across those airfields and sweep around towards ... not the Suribachi end of the island, but the other end. I remember them saying they felt that that was really going to be a bad place to be because that's where they feared we would get some heavy counter attacking and that sort of thing.

I have little memory of some of those details. I was on a collecting team. We had a first class who had gray hair, which to me meant he was a really old guy. He was in charge. We had one team member from North Carolina who got killed. I think there were six or seven of us on the team.

Was there a physician on the team?

I don't remember ever seeing a physician nor a battalion aid station. My parent unit was the Fourth Medical Battalion. And I assumed this was customary. The companies in the medical battalion assigned out people for operations to Marine units as support personnel. That's how we got there but I know nothing about the administration, about how they did that. I don't remember any experiences with physicians in 3/25. But I wasn't there that long; I got wacked the first day.

We offloaded sometime in the morning. My memory of it is that we were in the eighth wave to go in.

Would that have been in the early afternoon?

I think H-hour was around 9 o'clock and I'm just speculating here... I don't think it would have been noon. It would have been some time between then and noon. Getting on that boat and getting to the beach was... getting out and looking at big old sandy banks, big old dark sand banks in front of us. My other memories were that there were shells exploding everywhere. They were just everywhere. And every time one hit you saw gear, people, body parts... things just being blown apart. There were a lot of people there. I remember some of the guys were actually making it up over that first little terrace edge. But I never got past it. That would have been very tough going. I don't know how anybody survived it. God, it was just... The air was thick with things flying. The air stayed full of that black dirt, smoke, and all that noise. Every time another boat would pull in at the water's edge, why they would just straddle it. It was a continuous roar and explosion.

I finally was able to do a little bit of something that I was trained for, as skimpy as my training was. I got a guy--a Marine--who had a really bad leg wound. I got him bandaged up. I remember he was wearing a personal pistol. And I used his pistol belt to make a tournequet for him. I gave him some morphine and moved on to somebody else.

Was he evacuated at that point?

I have no idea. I noticed that there was a guy at the edge of the water, right next to an amtrac that had been stopped right there. This guy had been hurt and the waves were getting him. He was sliding down in the water. I went down next to him and got him under the arm and pulled him up enough to get him on dry land. And while I was doing that, a shell hit right there in the water at our feet. I assume it was a mortar of some kind. I remember I felt it slap at my leg and I looked to see what was going on with me. But I wasn't hurting and didn't seem to be bleeding or in pain. I never did anything for the guy but pull him up out of the water. I just moved on to somebody else.

I had an occasion to plug a sucking chest wound, one of those things that they pretty vividly described as the first aid thing where you simply plugged the hole. I saw the unit chaplain just over to my right. He was sitting right next to a concrete pillbox. It was about a foot out of the ground. The rest of it was covered with dirt. I noticed he was holding his face in his hands and the blood was running out between his fingers. I headed over there to see if there was anything I could do. But I should back up just a bit. Before I saw the chaplain, one of my team mates was hit. I arrived at his side as he was breathing his last breath. He already had been wounded once in the arm and had holes through his cheek and was pretty badly wounded again. There was another one of our collecting team beside him. I don't know how you assess time in a situation like that but we dealt with him until he died. And then I saw the chaplain with his head in his hands and bleeding like hell. As I headed over and got next to that pillbox, suddenly there were tracers coming out of those hills on the right side. The fire was coming down and bouncing off the corner of that pillbox right where I was. My conclusion was that it was no longer just random shooting. The sonofabitch was shooting at me. I got on my belly right there to get as low as I could.

About that time, there was a humongous explosion that just felt like it slammed me into the ground. I lost all feeling in my legs and lower back and that was pretty much the course of

things for me. I guess I had decided at that time I had probably qualified for departure and I started heading down to the water's edge, kind of scooting along on my belly. And then some people grabbed me and put me in a boat. And away I went.

What ever became of that chaplain you were trying to reach?

I didn't get a chance to help him and sitting near him was my team leader, a first class named Train. And his leg was all mangled and messed up. I didn't get to help either one of them. Suddenly, I had more trouble of my own than I could manage.

All this happened not far from the water's edge, then?

I never got over the first little terrace. None of our guys did. We hit the beach and started treating casualties right there. We never got organized in any way and I never got more than 20-30 feet from the water.

Where did the boat take you?

Looking at the thing in hindsight, I now know that there was a system working that was organized and planned. The boat went to a barge which was tied up alongside an LST further out. And that was their sorting point. Anyway, that was the evacuation route and they sorted us at this little platform and then I went to another APA that had converted back to receive casualties. I have no idea what the name of that one was either. By then, I was starting to get a little feeling back in my legs. They put me to bed in one of the holds.

You had no idea as to the nature of your injuries at that point.

I had no idea what the shrapnel had done to me at all. I had no idea what had happened with the concussion or whatever it was, nor how permanent my injuries were. I just didn't know.

What kind of treatment had you gotten up to that point?

The plan was, you hit this barge tied up to the side of the LST and they triaged you from there. And then they assigned you to wherever they wanted you to go. In my case, it was that APA. There, a doctor looked me over. They did nothing for me. There was nothing going on. I think my leg was bandaged. In the scope of things, whatever was wrong was probably pretty minor. And then went I went off to one of those troop compartments and sacked out.

What happened when you woke up?

The first time I tried to get up and get around... Of course, you've got no bedside nursing service. Nobody did except for the seriously wounded who couldn't get up and walk around, or do anything for themselves. The first time I got up, all I had was a little soreness, nothing serious or lingering. I found out later on, once I got back to the states that I had some shrapnel in the back of my left shoulder. I didn't even know that at the time. I think the wound in my leg was probably through and through. When that paralysis started wearing off, it felt like I had been really cold or frozen and was starting to thaw out.

All those APAs at night would run seaward and then they would come back in in the morning to be closer. One of those nights out there. either the second or third night, we had another ship run into us. That was pretty exciting. We actually had people abandon ship. I got up topside and was looking down at the railing when I saw some guys climbing back up one of those nets they would drop down. They had launched one of those rafts but it had floated away

before they could get on it. You could look out in the water and see those little one-cell flashlights they used to attach to life preservers. I could see lots of them floating in the water where people had already jumped off of that thing. There were guys in big casts and I remember somebody in a body cast. They were hauling them up topside because I think they thought the ship was going to sink. I think the ship that ran into us was an AKA. Damage control finally got everything under control. There was a big section of the ship on the side where they hit us that was cordoned off until we got back to Guam. When we came off of that thing and went down the pier, I swear you could have stuck my house in that hole.

Did they take you to surgery to remove any shrapnel?

No. They simply bandaged me and that was it. I got a feeling the traffic was such that I was small pototoes. When we got to Guam I went to the little hospital there. I think it was a base hospital and stayed there after being looked at once or twice. I don't even remember how many days I was there, may just 2 or 3. And then I was back at the Marine transient center. We spent a number of days there. I only saw one guy from my section anywhere after I left Iwo and he showed up there in Guam at that base hospital. He was dumbfounded to see me and I was dumbfounded to see him. It's hard to describe that reaction now. Everybody was getting killed. It was just a damn miracle to get out of that mess.

I guess you got what they called the million dollar wound.

At least half a million. Anyway, we stayed around that transient center for awhile. Guam still had Japanese folks on it then, who were left over from the fighting. They would cut out a little section of jungle and put in some tents for us. At night when you hit the sack, we were all hanging mess gear and all that stuff on those tents just in case anybody touched them. If you jumped up and hollered boo, you probably would have been shot. Everybody was as spooky as hell. And occasionally, they would catch one of those little Japanese guys around at the mess hall or someplace like that. It was boring as hell to just sit around with all those people and you didn't know what's going to happen to you or where you were going to go. We would venture out to the edge of the jungle probing around and just looking to see what we could see. And sometimes you'd hear somebody run through the underbrush. There was one of those K-9 kennels out along there somewhere and you'd hear them just raising the devil once and awhile.

Were you attached to any organization at that point?

As far as I know, I was just in the transient center. The Marines must have had administrative control over us.

How long were you there in that status?

Just a few days. When we left Guam we went on one of the strangest vessels I've ever been on in my life. They loaded us onto a small merchant ship. It had Navy gun crews and the guys who ran the sick bay were all Army guys. Civilians made up the rest of the crew. It was a totally strange outfit as far as I was concerned. I can't explain it. Anyway, they got us back to Hawaii, to the Marine transient center at Pearl. I was there when Roosevelt died. Then we loaded out of there to come back to the states and I rode a ship called the *Matsonia*, one of the Matson liners they converted during the war to haul troops. We came back into Treasure Island around June of '45.

Where did you go then?

The Treasure Island thing was an experience itself. It's hard to imagine thousands upon thousands of men going to eat at the same place every day. There were lines up and down the streets. We had a little liberty in town. Eventually, I got out of there on a 30-day leave and came back to North Carolina. I then reported back to the Naval receiving station in Norfolk. My assignment out of there, after just 2 or 3 days, was Camp Perry in Williamsburg. That's where I started getting bothered by the little bit of shrapnel in my left shoulder. The doctor there just removed it the sick bay. But I was only there for 2 or 3 weeks. And then I got orders to Naval Hospital Portsmouth. I went there and ran movie projectors.

Were you there when the war ended?

No. The war ended while I was still at Camp Perry. Camp Perry was full of German POWs and the atmosphere was a little strange. People were happy and celebrating but it was also a serious time, at least for me. I guess my growing up really started there at Iwo. For the first time, it really got through to me that I could really get hurt. I could get killed. And that had never bothered me much before. That invulnerability of youth. I had puttered around as a teenager and survived but I don't think I really started appreciating that until it got really personal--that guy shooting at me from up in those hills at Iwo. If you can see a tracer, you never know how many are in between the ones you're seeing. And then getting slammed around and getting holes punched in my body. I think it finally got through to me that this is much much bigger than just an adventure.